



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Richmond

January 4, 2024

Dear Brothers,

Since its release on Dec. 18, 2023, and the clarification of the statement from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on January 4, 2024 regarding “*Fiducia Supplicans* On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings” some of you have inquired about guidance or instructions that might follow. Prior to offering my reflections, I suggest that if you have not already done so, you take time to read the document which can be found at:

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dof_doc_2023_1218_fiducia-supplicans_en.html. It is worthy of reflection and prayer as it is a thoughtful explanation on the practice in the Church of the offering and use of blessings.

In reviewing this document, it may be helpful to keep in mind that each of us has a share in the oversight of the community of faith and we are called upon to use prudential pastoral judgment on how best to respond to the needs and requests presented to us by the faithful of our diocese.

For those in our parish communities who have questions, I would emphasize that the blessings mentioned in the declaration do not entail as significant a change to Church practice that the secular media and others might suggest. More often than not, they fail to provide adequate context for what the Church teaches and why.

In the declaration, Pope Francis is conveying what he believes is important in terms of Church teaching, i.e., how God acts toward us. The Holy Father notes that God’s way is one of tenderness, effusive love that is patient, kind and generous. Since this is how God treats us, this is how we as a Church should care for one another and for those outside the Church.

No teaching has been changed. Nothing has been changed with regard to Church teaching, practice, or prayer. The declaration reiterates what is already possible and could be applied in pastoral settings with which we are familiar. It is a generous interpretation, application, and context of how blessings are offered.

The declaration reminds us that there are different kinds of blessings. The blessings that are covered in this document are ones that are spontaneous, informal, non-liturgical, and brief. Thus, there will be no policies, guidelines, rituals, or drafts of blessings added to the Book of Blessings or other liturgical books developed for it.

Some blessings, like the general blessing we offer after Mass or when we pray with someone who is struggling with some difficulty in which they ask for a blessing, are for the most part spontaneous, informal, non-liturgical, and brief. They do not validate, affirm, or confirm any particular state in life. They are intended to express God's desire that we receive his grace and help to increase in holiness. People seeking blessings recognize a need, that they may be imperfect and sinful, but they are trying to grow in their relationship with God.

This type of blessing is available to all, independent of age, capacity, or circumstances of life. They give expression to the desire to assist someone with the grace of God — grace which is compared in the Scriptures to rain which falls on the just and the unjust alike. The Holy Father is emphasizing mercy over judgment in making these blessings available to those who request them.

However, these blessings are not to be given in any liturgical or public setting to protect against confusion with sacraments and the possibility that it would be interpreted as the Church approving of sinful behavior. If someone seeks a blessing for the purpose of affirming or celebrating a state in life that is sinful, such a blessing should be withheld or postponed until that situation is clarified because of the confusion or scandal it would cause and because the Church cannot approve of, nor can it appear to approve of, sin.

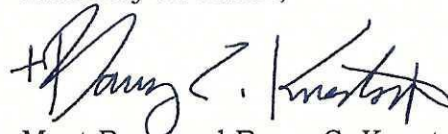
If a parishioner or any other individual approaches you for such a blessing, it should be done in a personal, non-liturgical setting so as not to be a cause of confusion. If such a blessing were structured, formalized in ritual language, or offered in a liturgical setting, it would be contrary to the intent of the declaration.

These blessings should only be offered informally when requested spontaneously, with reasonable assurance on your part that the request is being made not to approve or validate an irregular situation, but when the person making the request approaches you sincerely, recognizing their need for grace and asking God's help to grow in holiness.

These situations provide an opportunity for you to sensitively ask the individual what kind of blessing they are requesting, and to encourage them to address with you, at another time, concerns regarding irregular unions or other situations they may be in. Additionally, these moments may also provide you with the opportunity to reaffirm the Church's constant teaching and practice and to validate the desire of the faithful to strive for continued conversion and a life of holiness consistent with the practice of the Church.

Again, I urge you to read the declaration prayerfully and to apply it pastorally to all to whom you minister. With my gratitude and prayerful best regards, I remain

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barry C. Knestout". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond